

Message Text

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SUBJ: PROMINENT MALAYSIAN JOURNALIST CONFESSES COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 3564, (B) KUALA LUMPUR 3613, (C) KUALA LUMPR
3803, (D) KUALA LUMPUR 4739, (E) SINGAPORE 3125, (F) SINGAPORE
3139, (G) SINGAPORE 3213.

1. SUMMARY. PROMINENT MALAYSIAN JOURNALIST AND LITERARY FIGURE
SAMAD ISMAIL, ARRESTED JUNE 22 FOR ALLEGED COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES,
HAS CONFESSED. CONFESSION MADE PUBLIC DURING SPECIAL
TELEVISION BROADCAST SEPT 1 CONTAINING INTERVIEW WITH SAMAD IN
WHICH HE ADMITS HE IS A COMMUNIST OF LONG STANDING, WAS DIRECTED
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TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO TO PENETRATE THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY HERE,

UMNO, AND SUCCEEDED IN GAINING INFLUENCE AND ENTREE AMONG UMNO LEADERSHIP AND ELSEWHERE. GLARING OMISSION IS LACK OF INFORMATION IN HIS NARRATIVE ABOUT ASSOCIATION IN 1950'S WITH SINGAPORE-BASED PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY AND LEE KUAN YEW. OUR INITIAL ASSESSMENT IS THAT INTERVIEW, ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY STAGED AND PRE-REHEARSED, WAS MUCH MORE CREDIBLE THAN WOODEN PERFORMANCES BY THE TWO SINGAPORE MALAY JOURNALISTS IN SIMILAR BROADCASTS LAST JUNE. SAMAD'S NAME IS A HOUSEHOLD WORD FOR MALAYS HERE AND HIS ARREST AND CONFESSION HAVE AROUSED CONTROVERSY AND SPECULATION LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME TO COME. END SUMMARY.

2. RADIO/TV MALAYSIA TELECAST SPECIAL PRE-RECORDED PROGRAM EVENING SEPT 1 MODERATED BY IRREPRESSIBLE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS GHAZALI SHAFIE AND CENTERPIECED BY FILMED CONFESSION OF COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES BY FORMER "NEW STRAITS TIMES" GROUP MANAGING EDITOR ABDUL SAMAD ISMAIL, ARRESTED UNDER THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (ISA) LAST JUNE 22 (REFS A AND B). PROGRAM, ORIGINALLY ANNOUNCED FOR AUG 30 BUT POSTPONED WITHOUT EXPLANATION, WAS DOMINATED BY GHAZALI WHO IN LENGTHY LECTURE ALONG LINES HIS AUG 13 INTERVIEW (REF D) REITERATED THEME "WE ARE ON TOP AND THEY (COMMUNISTS) ARE WEAK," CALLED FOR CONTINUED PUBLIC VIGILANCE AGAINST COMMUNISTS AND THEIR VARIED TACTICS, AND CITED NEED FOR CLOSE COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES -- INDONESIA, THAILAND AND SINGAPORE -- IN COMBATING COMMUNISTS. A FILM CLIP FOLLOWED SHOWING A BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH A MISS AW YOE CHOY, A FORMER CONSTRUCTION WORKER, IN WHICH SHE CONFESSED HER MEMBERSHIP IN THE MALAYAN NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF), UNDERGROUND SUBVERSIVE ARM OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALAYA, CENTRAL COMMITTEE FACTION -- CPM-CC), AND HER ROLE AS A SENTRY IN THE SABOTAGE BOMBING OPERATION AGAINST THE NATIONAL MONUMENT HERE AUG 26, 1975 (75 KUALA LUMPUR 5138 - NOTAL).

3. IN HIS INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING PRE-RECORDED INTERVIEW OF SAMAD ISMAIL, GHAZALI SHAFIE EXPLAINED THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE ENSUING INTERVIEW WAS TO HIGHLIGHT COMMUNIST UNITED FRONT METHODS. HE CLAIMED THAT UPON BECOMING HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER HE CONVEYED HIS FEELING OF "UNEASINESS" TO LATE PRIME MINISTER RAZAK IN 1974 AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EARLY 1975 RE SAMAD ISMAIL'S ACTIVITIES AND ABILITY TO MOVE "SO FREELY" IN VARIOUS CIRCLES."BUT AT THAT TIME I WAS UNABLE TO GET CONCLUSIVE PROOF THAT HE WAS AN UNDESIRABLE ELEMENT," GHAZALI CONTENDED, ADDING, "DESPITE THAT, WE CAN TELL A COMMUNIST, AS WE CAN TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TEMPAYAK AND A DURIAN (LOCAL FRUITS) FROM ITS SMELL*" NOTING THAT TUN RAZAK "DIRECTED ME TO GET THE PROOF," GHAZ WENT ON TO CITE HIS CONTACTS WITH THE SINGAPORE AND INDONESIAN

GOVERNMENTS RE SAMAD ISMAIL'S ACTIVITIES IN THOSE COUNTRIES AND THE SUBSEQUENT "METICULOUS" INVESTIGATION OF HOW AN EMINENT MEMBER OF THIS COMMUNIST UNITED FRONT WAS ABLE TO ENTER OUR SOCIETY."

4. IN THE INTERVIEW ITSELF, SAMAD, WHO LOOKED TIRED AND HAGGARD SAID THAT ALLEGATIONS HE ACTIVELY PROPAGATED COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY AND FURTHERED COMMUNIST OBJECTIVES WERE TRUE, CLAIMING HE HAS SPENT OVER THREE QUARTERS OF HIS LIFE "AS A COMMUNIST AND IN TRYING TO CAUSE THIS COUNTRY TO ADOPT COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY." HE NARRATED HIS INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES STEMMING FROM HIS ENTRY INTO THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF MALAYA (CPM) IN 1949, NOTING THAT HE HAD BEEN OPERATING UNDER A DIRECTIVE GIVEN HIM DURING A SIX MONTH STAY IN INDONESIA IN 1957 BY ONE ABDULLAH SUDIN TO PENETRATE THE UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (UMNO). SAMAD WENT ON TO DESCRIBE THE EASE BY WHICH HE PENETRATED UMNO SINGAPORE, FOLLOWING WHICH HE MOVED FROM SINGAPORE TO KUALA LUMPUR WHEN HIS NEWSPAPER'S HEAD OFFICE WAS TRANSFERRED THERE, BUT MAKING NO MENTION OF HIS FALLING OUT WITH LEE KUAN YEW AT THE TIME. IN KUALA LUMPUR HE SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS A "COMPETENT JOURNALIST" AND WHILE NOT FORMALLY ENTERING UMNO HERE WAS ABLE TO GAIN ACCESS AND INFLUENCE WITH UMNO MEMBERS TO THE EXTENT OF EVEN BEING "CONSULTED ON SUCH VITAL UNDERTAKINGS AS PLANNING FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS."

5. SAMAD CITED HIS SUCCESS SUBSEQUENT TO 1964 AMONG "YOUNGER GENERATION OF UMNO LEADERS" WHO WERE "IMPRESSED BY MY IDEAS" AND WHO "AFTER I HAD GAINED THEIR CONFIDENCE CONSTANTLY CONSULTED ME ON VARIOUS ISSUES." SOME, HE NOTED, BECAME DEPENDENT ON HIM AND THROUGH THEM HE CLAIMED HE WAS ABLE TO INFLUENCE KEY UMNO LEADERS TO "SEE THINGS AND RESOLVE PROBLEMS MY WAY." ASKED BY THE INTERVIEWER TO ELABORATE, HE INDICATED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HIS AIM WAS "TO FURTHER THE COMMUNIST CAUSE." SAMAD ALSO CLAIMED TO HAVE MADE FRIENDS IN OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES, SOME OF WHOM HE WAS ABLE TO "EDUCATE AND USE" FOR HIS COMMUNIST ENDS. SAMAD CONCLUDED BY NOTING THAT HIS APPROACH WAS A SOPHISTICATED AND SUBTLE ONE WHEREBY MANY OF THOSE HE USED FOR HIS PURPOSES WERE UNAWARE OF HIS "REAL COMMUNIST MOTIVES." HE ADDED THAT HAD HE NOT BEEN ARRESTED HE UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD HAVE SUCCEEDED IN FURTHER ENLARGING HIS SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

6. COMMENT: OUR PRELIMINARY VIEW IS THAT SAMAD'S PUBLIC CONFESSION, ALTHOUGH UNDOUBTEDLY REHEARSED AND POSSIBLY MADE UNDER DURESS, IS MORE CREDIBLE THAN SIMILAR BROADCASTS OF JOURNALISTS ARRESTED IN SINGAPORE. SAMAD DID NOT SEEM TO BE READING FROM A TEXT OR CUE CARDS AND

SEEMED ANIMATED AT SOME POINTS. ALTHOUGH HAGGARD, HE APPEARED COMPOSED AND SELF-POSSESSED. HIS CONFESSION OF COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES WAS CATEGORICAL, BUT THESE ACTIONS WERE BROAD AND IDEOLOGICAL RATHER THAN SPECIFIC CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES; WHAT HE ADMITTED WAS GENERAL "SUBVERSION" RATHER THAN SPECIFIC MISDEEDS SUCH AS INTELLIGENCE GATHERING. WE DETECTED NO SIGNS OF REMORSE OR REGRET AND THERE WAS AN UNDERTONE OF PRIDE IN HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS. AN AWKWARD GAP APPEARED IN THE INTERVIEW (BETWEEN QUESTION FIVE AND SIX IN WRITTEN TEXT; THE FILM ALSO APPEARED SPLICED AT THIS POINT) WHERE A QUESTION REFERS BACK TO A PREVIOUS QUESTION THAT DOES NOT APPEAR ELSEWHERE BUT WHICH IN THE CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE SEEMS TO COVER THE PERIOD OF SAMAD'S ACTIVITIES IN SINGAPORE INCLUDING ASSOCIATION WITH LEE KUAN YEW AND PAP UP TO HIS VISIT TO INDONESIA IN 1957. ALTHOUGH BROADCAST SEEMS TO US TO SUBSTANTIATE GOM ALLEGATIONS THAT SAMAD ISMAIL INDEED IS A COMMUNIST, NATURE OF HIS RECENT CONTACTS, IF ANY, WITH OTHER COMMUNIST OPERATIVES REMAINS UNCLEAR. WE ALSO ARE CURIOUS ABOUT THE IDENTITIES OF THE "YOUNG UMNO LEADERS" ALLEGED TO BE UNDER HIS INFLUENCE.

7. WE WILL POUCH FULL TEXT EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF SAMAD ISMAIL INTERVIEW, WHICH WE ASSUME ALSO WILL BE REPORTED BY FBIS. THE OFFICIAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION, APPARENTLY DONE BY THE HOME MINISTRY, IS IMPRECISE AND WE ARE NOW DOING OUR OWN TRANSLATION OF MALAY LANGUAGE HANDOUT FOR SAKE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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